



DENCA Advisory Council Minutes

September 21, 2011

Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Grand Junction, CO

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction and
- Terry Kimber of Delta

Not attending:

- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Ben Blom, Catherine Robertson and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Sherry Schenk, Eric Rechel, Jan Potterveld, Joyce Olson, Kent Davis, Kaye Simonson.

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum.

Stevens announced there will be two community workshops in October with Forest Service Economist Henry Eichman. The dates are:

- October 18: Grand Junction
- October 19: Delta

The purpose of the Socioeconomic Strategies Workshop is to identify BLM management opportunities that further the social and economic goals of area communities. To further this goal, participants and BLM will explore the existing role of BLM in the community and where community desired conditions could be supported during the RMP.

Eichmann has expertise in:

- Resource, Environmental and Regional Economics – including financial and economic efficiency analyses, non-market valuation, and IMPLAN analysis
- Social Analysis

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - socioeconomic analyses for Environmental Impact Statements and Environmental Assessments.

Action items & Recommendations

Stevens turned to action items and recommendations from the Advisory Council over the last few months. A seven-page summary document was handed out, regarding major themes and the recommendations relevant to the NCA's different zones.

Regarding major themes, **Stevens** cited three:

- Repeated recognition by the Advisory Council that the Council is working on a National *Conservation* Area, not a National *Recreation* Area.
- At multiple meetings, the Council discussed the benefits and drawbacks of SRMA-style management vs. ERMA-style management, and the tradeoffs for each.
- Cactus Park—the zone nearest the population center of Grand Junction, is of great interest to the public.

Discussion: The key to NCA management is managing people and recreation -- people have discovered D-E NCA and more are coming – BLM must plan for that. Recreation is the basis of management in the NCA. Any user group that wants something should be prepared to help build it or pay for it. Concern raised on how future budgets will mesh with planning goals? Budgets are up to Congress and the President. Basic budgets cover staff, while extra money is requested for improvements and special projects. Limited dollars force BLM to prioritize. What gets funded is a mix of local and national priorities. D-E NCA shares staff with the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre field offices.

Zone 1 (Hunting Grounds)

Past discussions centered on trails:

- Connection trail between Grand Junction and Delta, running through D-E NCA.
- Old Spanish Trail. Consider interpretive displays along highway.
- Trail sustainability means closing some trails, create new.

Wilson suggested that one way to deal with shooting refuse and trash would be to dedicate gun ranges and manage them – perhaps in partnership with local gun clubs. **Massey** asked whether a target range is appropriate in a NCA – whether it might stress wildlife.

Regarding cultural sites, discussion Harris mentioned adding a few interpretive sites like the rock art near Escalante bridge, and not draw public attention to the rest. Site stewards should be recruited, he added.

Kimber suggested that routes providing access to wilderness boundary should not be considered dead ends. **Harris** noted the need to re-route around non-sustainable trail sections. Stevens noted past discussion about how quiet users want a couple of trails, the need to consider prairie dogs and antelope and the question of designated or dispersed campground or campsites.

Zone 2 (Gunnison River)

Given the popularity and crowding at the mouth of the Dominguez Canyon, this zone may require intensive management of recreation – the management of outcomes and settings.

While there has been initial concern about motorized boats on the river, the problem may be overstated. Discussion turned to the need for new dispersed camping sites along the river to relieve pressure on the canyon mouth site.

Regarding recreational gold prospecting, the Council expressed discomfort with the amount of dirt/gravel being moved and said BLM should be restrictive. Since all other recreational uses are casual – the same thing should apply with gold prospecting.

Theme emerged of BLM monitoring situations and using adaptive management if problems arise.

Minnick noted that McInnis Canyon would have benefited from triggering adaptive management sooner.

Neuhof suggested that a Ruby/Horsethief permit system may be a good model for the Gunnison River.

Massey wants better maps to help public distinguish between public and private lands. **Steele** endorsed idea, adding that GPS coordinates for campsites would be useful as well.

Regarding weed control, knapweed and biological controls should be a big focus.

BREAK

Stevens noted that in past discussions, Council members expressed the desire to protect the outstanding values of streams and river segments, by using legislative, administrative and regulatory tools, other than the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Conserving the values is important to the Council.

Zone 3

Discussions about Cactus Park and Nine Mile explored differences between Special RMA- and Extensive RMA-style management, motorized vs. non-motorized, the desire for quiet areas, how Nine Mile Canyon should be used, impacts on bighorn sheep and the desire for new, motorized recreation trails.

Discussions carried an over-riding theme of protecting resources.

Neuhof asked whether a SRMA can exist right next to an ERMA? **Stevens** answered yes, but that they need to make management sense. Council and audience members weighed management alternatives.

Kimber said SRMA approach would cost the most. **Stevens** noted that upfront costs of resource surveys will be critical. **Harris** noted Uncompahgre Field Office experience of spending \$24,000 to complete a cultural survey of 800 acres – aimed at finding out where cultural sites are *before* new trails were planned.

Discussion focused on limiting the size of groups, such as the 25-heartbeat rule for wilderness.

Zone 4 Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

Stevens noted that the alternative trail and parking lot for the Bridgeport bridge are approved – final decision for the tunnel under the railroad tracks is pending.

Stevens also noted past discussions on need to restrict the presence of dogs in Dominguez Canyon during bighorn sheep lambing season.

Discussion of wilderness area explored whether it should be managed for natural or untrammeled values. **Kimber** said he was of two minds – willing to see weeds eradicated, but don't tear out an old gate. **Steele** asked whether bighorn should be actively managed? **Atchley** asked about wildfire in the wilderness. **Stevens** responded that natural fires would be allowed to run their course, yet concerns about cheatgrass could mean putting fires out. BLM planning staff is close to having alternatives that show how these different wilderness values would play out.

Zone 5: Escalante Canyon

Past discussions have noted that both the City of Delta and Delta County see D-E NCA as an opportunity to bring more tourism and recreation to Delta. Delta County Commissioner **Atchley** emphasized that the county believes ranching has both economic and cultural value and must not be sacrificed for greater tourism and recreational activity in the zone. The road down Escalante Canyon is not designed for greater numbers of tourists. Where will funds come from to improve that road. **Massey** also advocated for the area's ranching heritage. His family's ranching operation has lasted 100 years and ranching practices have developed for good reasons. **Steele** said private property rights cannot be forgotten.

Public comment

Rechel asked that state game biologists come in and brief the Council about wildlife in general – not just big game species in D-E NCA. **Neuhof** asked if computerized map overlays could be brought in before the Council.

Council members thanked BLM staff for capturing seven pages of recommendation over the past eight months. **Steele** said further discussion about bighorn sheep can wait until sheep grazing allotment permit holders can be brought in.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be 3 p.m., October 5, in Delta. The focus will be on wildlife.